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# Shakers and Jerkers: Letters from the "Long Walk," 1805, Part I

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# Shakers and Jerkers:

## Letters from the “Long Walk,” 1805, Part 1

By Douglas L. Winiarski\*



Reports of a bizarre new religious phenomenon made their way over the mountains from Tennessee during the summer and fall of 1804. For several years, readers in the eastern states had been eagerly consuming news of the Great Revival, the powerful succession of Presbyterian sacramental festivals and Methodist camp meetings that played a formative role in the development of the southern Bible Belt and the emergence of early American evangelicalism. Letters from the frontier frequently included vivid descriptions of the so-called “falling exercise,” in which the bodies of revival converts crumpled to the ground during powerful sermon performances on the terrors of hell. But an article that appeared in the *Virginia Argus* on October 24, 1804, announced the sudden emergence of a deeply troubling new form of convulsive somatic distress. Alarmed observers had given the strange new “bodily agitations” a name. They called them “THE JERKS.”<sup>1</sup>

The anonymous *Virginia Argus* correspondent described a “strange nervous disease” that had recently broken out during a militia muster in Abingdon, Virginia. Two young recruits had been thrown into “perpetual convulsive jerking” motions. Watching one of these “jerkers” in his fits, the correspondent remarked that “there was not five seconds of time during which some of his limbs, his neck, or his spine, were not drawn,

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\* The author is an associate professor of religious studies at the University of Richmond. Research support for this essay was provided through generous fellowships from the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, the Library of Virginia, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, and the University of Richmond.

<sup>1</sup> “The Jerks,” *Virginia Argus*, October 24, 1804; John Rogers, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself: With Additions and Reflections* (Cincinnati, 1847), 39. On the Great Revival, Presbyterian sacramental seasons, and Methodist camp meetings see, John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (1972; Lexington, KY, 1996); Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America’s Pentecost* (Madison, WI, 1990); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, 2001); Russell E. Richey, *Methodism in the American Forest* (New York, 2015).



*Initially published in a Richmond newspaper but widely reprinted throughout the eastern states, this article from the October 24, 1804, issue of the Virginia Argus describing an outbreak of "THE JERKS" in Abingdon, Virginia, provided the impetus for the Shaker missionaries' "Long Walk" to the trans-Appalachian frontier. Virginia Argus, October 24, 1804. Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.*

with a sudden jerk, in one direction or another."<sup>2</sup> Revival spectators elsewhere in the backcountry likened the twitching and gesticulating bodies to bouncing footballs, fish thrashing out of water, or the whipping flail at the end of a wheat thresher. In some cases, the subject's entire body would be thrown "backward and forward in quick succession," with the head "nearly touching the floor behind and before."<sup>3</sup>

The jerks were only the latest in a series of strange somatic manifestations that seemed to plague the revivals. Men and women burst into uncontrollable laughter, fell into trances, danced or rolled on the ground, and spoke in tongues. Hosts of angels purportedly appeared atop Chimney Rock Mountain in North Carolina, blood rained from the cloudless sky on an Ohio log cabin, and music issued inexplicably from the breasts of inspired revival participants. People barked like dogs, scampered up trees, ran through the woods, and engaged in elaborate pantomiming that mimicked fighting and fiddling. One concerned minister even suggested that parishioners in East Tennessee had invented a new exercise that "consists, in a large number of them collecting, and breaking wind behind, with all their might." To revival critics such as

## VIRGINIA ARGUS.

### RICHMOND:

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1804.

#### RICHMOND PRICE CURRENT.

CORRECTED WEEKLY.

Tobacco,	37s 6d Cash
Wheat,	8s do.
Flour, fine,	45s do.
Flour, superfine,	48s do.
Corn,	24s do.
Hemp, (clean)	£ 52 do.
Iron,	£ 33 do.
Bacon,	10d do.
Whiskey,	4s do.

*The following was communicated to the Editor of the ARGUS, by a gentleman at Abingdon, in this state.*

#### THE JERKS.

THE Camp Meetings in the Western states, have been productive of some phenomena, which have not been satisfactorily explained and some of which are becoming very interesting.

Persons who have been greatly affected at those meetings, have been exercised in various ways. They laugh, they sing, they dance; and as it would appear, all this is involuntarily done, being what the preachers call "religious exercises;" but it is doubtful whether these extravaganzas are not the offspring of free will.

There is one species of these "religious exercises" which are certainly involuntary, and they have spread from the camp and other religious meetings, in an alarming manner. These are called "the jerks." Some of those affected with this disorder, will rise up and with their eyes fixed and staring, make their feet roll on the floor as sticks upon a drum. But generally, the person who has this disorder, is vexed with a perpetual convulsive jerking in all his limbs. I have been told some of them will vault like Sully, and appear as if they would dash themselves to pieces, if not prevented. I have seen but one man affected with this disorder—there was not five seconds of time during which some of his limbs, his neck, or his spine, were not drawn, with a sudden jerk, in one direction or another.

<sup>2</sup> "The Jerks," *Virginia Argus*, October 24, 1804.

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, *Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, 40.

the *Virginia Argus* correspondent, the purported miracles and strange bodily fits attending the Great Revival were a ludicrous parody of authentic religion.<sup>4</sup>

Widely reprinted in the eastern newspapers, the story of the Abingdon jerkers immediately drew the attention of the Shaker community at New Lebanon, New York. Less than two months later, on January 1, 1805, leaders of the controversial religious sect dispatched three leading members, John Meacham (1770-1854), Issachar Bates (1758-1837), and Benjamin Youngs (1774-1855), on a 1,200-mile tour that came to be known as the “Long Walk.” Their mission was to observe the western revivals firsthand and assess the prospects for gathering new Shaker communities in the backcountry settlements.

Part travel narrative, part ethnography, the letters that follow in this two-part series provide exceptionally vivid descriptions of the jerks and other controversial revival practices that flourished among the Scots-Irish Presbyterian laity—often out of sight of their ministers. An edited transcription of John Meacham’s January 31, 1805 account of the Shakers’ travels through the northeast and the Great Valley of Virginia is printed below with permission of the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio. A second letter chronicling the missionaries’ subsequent journey through East Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio, will appear in volume 90 of *The Journal of East Tennessee History*.

Together with Benjamin Youngs’s travel journals and Issachar Bates’s autobiography, these little-known Shaker manuscripts shed new light on a critical turning point in the Great Revival. At this time, the euphoria of mass conversions and camp meetings devolved into increasingly bitter debates over the propriety of unbounded bodies. As the Shakers quickly discovered during their Long Walk to Ohio, the jerks and other somatic phenomena contributed to the splintering of the Presbyterian Church and fueled the growth of competing denominations, including the Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Cumberland Presbyterians.<sup>5</sup>

By 1800, the “Shaking Quakers,” or United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Coming as they came to be known, had emerged as the most successful sectarian religious movement in the young United States. Adherents believed that the sect’s founder, an illiterate English mill worker and American émigré named Ann Lee, was the female incarnation of Jesus Christ and that her birth had inaugurated a new millennial dispensation

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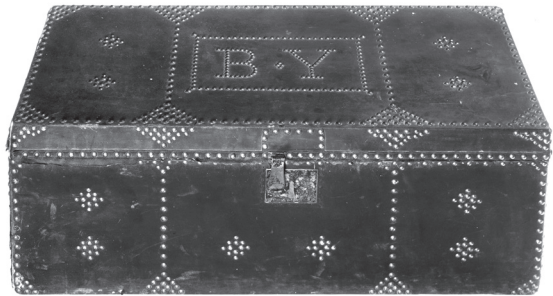
<sup>4</sup> Hezekiah Balch to Charles Coffin, December 15, 1803, box 1, Charles Coffin Papers, CS 04-05, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee Historical Society, Knoxville, Tennessee (Coffin Papers, McClung). On the somatic “extravagances” and visionary phenomena attending the revivals see, Robert Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky* (New York, 1847), 142-55; Richard M’Nemar, *The Kentucky Revival* (Albany, NY, 1808), 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> On the breakdown of frontier Presbyterianism and the rise of competing denominations see, Boles, *Great Revival*, 143-63; Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, 115-63; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989).



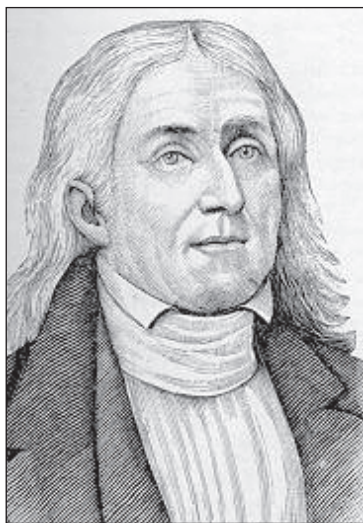
in Christian history. During the two decades following Lee's death in 1784, the Shakers converted hundreds of spiritual seekers and organized them into orderly and prosperous communal villages in upstate New York and New England. Many of the earliest Shakers were disaffected Yankee Congregationalists and Baptists who had cast off the Calvinist theological heritage of their puritan ancestors. Confessing their sins to the Shaker elders—a controversial practice that raised eyebrows among mainstream Protestants who associated it with Catholicism—converts dissolved marital ties, committed their personal property and real estate to the community, and pledged to live together in reorganized celibate family groups governed by rigid gender divisions. Shaker worship featured ritualized dancing through which members disciplined their bodies in order to “shake off sin.” During this early period, carefully choreographed Shaker dancing frequently broke down into a riotous welter of noise and trembling bodies, as individual members gave vent to what they called the gifts of the Holy Spirit and whirled, shook “from head to foot,” or spoke in unknown languages.<sup>6</sup>

Meacham, Bates, and Youngs were well prepared for the challenging journey to the frontier. All three were committed believers who had converted to Shakerism more than a decade earlier. Meacham, the leader of the group, was the son of a prominent Shaker elder. Prior to his departure for the west, he had served in a critical leadership position, overseeing the Shakers' gathering order of young converts at New Lebanon. Bates, the oldest and only previously married member of the trio, was a Revolutionary War veteran and a talented musician who possessed a wide range of frontier survival skills. Diminutive and introspective, Youngs was an effective preacher who, in later years, would become one of the Shakers' most influential theologians. He and Bates spent the previous decade honing their missionary skills during short preaching trips in western Massachusetts and upstate New York. Accompanied by a single horse bearing a bulky portmanteau stocked with clothing, supplies, and a letter of introduction from



*The Shaker missionaries transported their clothing and travel supplies in a large portmanteau such as this one, which was embossed with Benjamin S. Youngs's initials. Shaker Museum/Mt. Pleasant, Old Chatham, New York.*

<sup>6</sup> Glendyne R. Wergland, ed., *Visiting the Shakers, 1778-1849: Watervliet, Hancock, Tyringham, New Lebanon* (Clinton, NY, 2007), 17, 138. On Ann Lee and early Shakerism see, Clarke Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers: From the Old World to the New World* (1987; Baltimore, 1998), 140-241; Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven, 1992), 2-38.



Witnessing the jerks among his parishioners in Maryville, Tennessee, Presbyterian minister and Cherokee missionary Gideon Blackburn (1772-1838) remarked that they were “only to be effected by the immediate finger of God.” “Gideon Blackburn,” n.d. Centre College Archives, Danville, Kentucky.

the New Lebanon ministry outlining the basic tenets of the Shaker faith, the three missionaries traveled along the Great Valley Road through Virginia and East Tennessee, over Cumberland Gap into the Kentucky Bluegrass country, and, eventually, to the small settlement of Turtle Creek in southern Ohio.<sup>7</sup>

Given the Shakers’ fascination with convulsive somatic phenomena, it is not surprising that Meacham, Bates, and Youngs chose Abingdon, Virginia, as their initial destination. Their circuitous itinerary, which carried the missionaries south into East Tennessee rather than directly west across Pennsylvania and down the Ohio River, reflected the geographic spread of the jerking phenomenon. To be sure, early reports from the trans-Appalachian revivals featured stories of men and women who had been “struck down” at outdoor gatherings. Witnesses recalled as many as a thousand people falling to the ground during the

memorable Presbyterian sacramental festival held at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in August 1801. Although the falling exercise prevailed for several years, however, the more distinctive jerking phenomenon described by the *Virginia Argus* correspondent developed late in the course of the Great Revival. And it had distinctly East Tennessee roots, as Meacham explained in his letter: “Jerking first took place at Tenessee & spread from thence to Kentucky.”<sup>8</sup>

One of the earliest accounts of “convulsions” erupting at a revival meeting appeared in a July 1803 letter by Gideon Blackburn, the prominent Presbyterian minister and Cherokee missionary from Maryville. Within a few months, “extravagant reports” of the strange “involuntary motions” emerged as a “material topic” of conversation in nearby Knoxville. Soon, residents including shopkeeper Richard Green Waterhouse were referring to the “sympathetic contagion” that “attacked” camp meeting participants as “the Jerks.” Traveling through East Tennessee in February 1804, Lorenzo

<sup>7</sup> On Meacham, Bates, and Youngs see, Stephen J. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers* (Lanham, MD, 2008), 14-16, 139-40, 251-53; Carol Medlicott, *Issachar Bates: A Shaker’s Journey* (Hanover, NH, 2013), 1-81.

<sup>8</sup> John Meacham, Issachar Bates, and Benjamin S. Youngs to “Beloved Elders & brethren,” January 31, 1805, IV:A-66, Shaker Manuscripts, 1723-1952, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio (Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS); Catharine C. Cleveland, *The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805* (Chicago, 1916), 188, 196. On Cane Ridge see, Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, 64-114; Neil Meyer, “Falling for the Lord: Shame, Revivalism, and the Origins of the Second Great Awakening,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9 (2011): 142-66.



Dow, the irrepressible Methodist itinerant preacher, described entire assemblies dissolved into the “singularity called the *jerks* or *jerking exercise*” during his sermons. “We have now got the silent, the jirking, the laughing, and the dancing also the running and pointing exercises,” declared Eliza Ramsey the following year. “Each one of these in their turns have staggered serious people,” she continued, “but they are still as it were constrained to acknowledge this O Lord is thy work, and it is wondrous in our eyes.”<sup>9</sup>

Among these early accounts from East Tennessee, John Wilkinson’s April 1805 letter to William Maclin, Tennessee’s first Secretary of State, provided the most detailed portrait. The jerking exercise, the prominent Maryville lawyer, surveyor, and parishioner in Blackburn’s New Providence Presbyterian Church explained:

consists in a sudden inclination, or reclining, of the shoulders, and is so quick, that the head appears to move too slow for the shoulders; the primary motion appearing to be in the breast. This is common to both sexes, but with this difference, that men seldom have more than one jerk, in several minutes, or perhaps hours or weeks; whereas, a woman will frequently continue a repetition of that motion as quick, or nearly as quick, as seconds, for ten or fifteen minutes, reclining backwards as far as her feet, or some other obstacle will permit her, and bending so far forwards, as almost to touch the floor with her head. The motion, in this case, is not, in general, so violent in women as in men; except the former be peculiarly strong and robust.<sup>10</sup>

Wilkinson estimated that as many as one in three people in East Tennessee had experienced the jerks or some other form of somatic distress during the recent revivals. Most were young women between the ages of twelve and twenty-five. Early outdoor revival meetings were ecumenical events that drew together families of various denominational persuasions, but the “subjects of this exercise,” Wilkinson noted carefully, were “mostly of the Presbyterian sect of religionists.”<sup>11</sup>

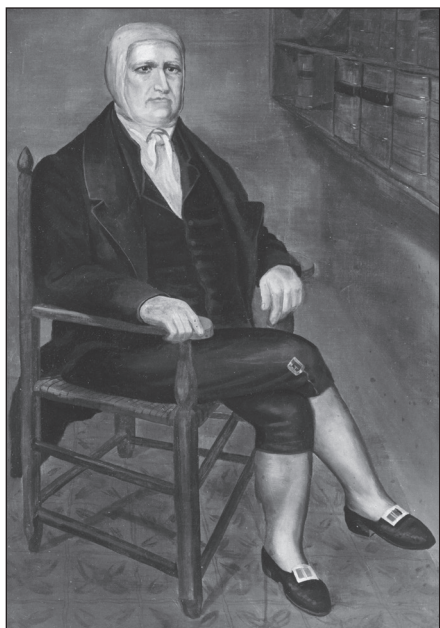
<sup>9</sup> Gideon Blackburn to William W. Woodward, August 3, 1803, Society Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Samuel G. Ramsey to Annie Fleming, November 29, 1803; Eliza Ramsey to Annie Baxter, September 3, 1805, all in box 1, George Addison Baxter Papers, Collection 003, Special Collections, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia; Richard Green Waterhouse, Journals, 1795–1897, typescript, 151, box 1, MS 918; David Campbell to Maria Campbell, September 14, 1803, typescript, box 3, St. George Leakin Sioussat Papers, MS 216, all in University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville, Tennessee; Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; Or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo’s Journal Concentrated in One* (New York, 1814), 195.

<sup>10</sup> John Wilkinson to William Maclin, April 18, 1805, in Benjamin Smith Barton, *The Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal* (Philadelphia, 1805), part 1, 2:91.

<sup>11</sup> Wilkinson to Maclin, April 1805, part 1, 2:88; Kathleen Wilkinson Wood, *The Gaston, Howard, and Wilkinson Families: A Genealogical History of Three Inter-married Families in the Black Belt of Alabama* (Baltimore, 1976), 282, 284, 286.

The jerks cast a long shadow across the frontier revivals of the early nineteenth century. Wilkinson's letter provided clinical evidence for one of Tennessee's first medical dissertations, a treatise in which the Nashville physician Felix Robertson attributed the somatic disorders to an epidemic of chorea or the notorious "dance of St. Vitus." Ministers, including Jacob Lake of Smith County, circulated manuscripts in which they urged colleagues to "prohibit all inordinate affections of the mind & jestures of the body." Most frontier autobiographies included a short discussion of the jerks—including several composed by notable Tennesseans. Writing on the eve of the Civil

War, Joseph Brown recalled how he had been "taken with the Jirks" near the summit of Cumberland Mountain while traveling to attend an 1804 treaty negotiation with Cherokee leaders at the Tellico Blockhouse; he had been struggling with them ever since. Later in the century, John Patton remembered an occasion in which he saw more than 500 men jerking "most violently" outside the Presbyterian meetinghouse in Jonesborough, desperately clutching at saplings trimmed to steady the afflicted. According to local folklore, the convulsions even afflicted the venerable Limestone minister Samuel Doak, who during one sermon in 1803 "was seized with such a violent attack of the jerks that he fell and went rolling and jerking down the hill."<sup>12</sup>



*Best known for organizing the first Presbyterian church in the old southwest and founding Tusculum College, the Reverend Samuel Doak was also one of the few clergymen who experienced fits of the jerks during the Great Revival. Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.*

During the spring and summer of 1804, the "Tenesse exercise" spread into the Kentucky Bluegrass country, the upcountry of South Carolina, the North Carolina piedmont, Middle Tennessee, and the Great Valley of Virginia. In

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<sup>12</sup> Felix Robertson, *An Essay on Chorea Sancti Viti, Submitted as an Inaugural Thesis, to the Examination of the Reverend John Andrews . . . , the Trustees and Medical Faculty of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1805), 5; [Jacob] Lake to Hezekiah Balch, June 2, 1804, [13], box 1, Coffin Papers, McClung; Joseph Brown, Biographical Sketch No. 1, ca. 1860, 9, Joseph Brown Papers, 1772-1965, box 1, folder 1, Tennessee Historical Society, available at, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; "The Autobiography of Reverend Frederick Augustus Ross, D.D., in Letters to a Lady of Knoxville, Tennessee (Mrs. Juliet Park White)," 1862-1863, 135, typescript, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; "Jerks in the Revival of 1800," 1932, typescript, Lees McRae College, available at, Digital Library of Appalachia, <http://dla.acaweb.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/LeesMcRae/id/20/rec/1>.



October, the jerks broke out during the militia muster in Abingdon, which the anonymous correspondent criticized in his letter in the *Virginia Argus*. Similar reports from the Greenbrier Valley in what is now West Virginia prompted the Lexington Presbytery to warn local clergymen to “prevent as far as may be in their power, all extraordinary bodily exercises which appear voluntary and ostentatious.” The following May, a student at Washington Academy (now Washington and Lee University) noted that the jerks had recently returned to the region and prevailed among the “lower class of people.” “These strange appearances have crossed the Alleghany” mountains, concluded one minister in a letter written shortly after the Shaker missionaries departed on the Long Walk, “and seem to be progressing pretty fast eastward.”<sup>13</sup>

By the time that Meacham, Bates, and Youngs crossed the Potomac River into Virginia, the Great Valley was buzzing with news and gossip about the unusual extraordinary convulsions. In Leesburg, the Shakers listened as Jane McCabe, the proprietor of the Red Lion tavern, recounted a lurid story involving a “bitter opposer against the jerkers” in Alexandria who had been unexpectedly “seized” by the strange fits, which broke his back and neck. Although they found the taverner’s account “amazingly misconstrued,” the missionaries took seriously the information she provided on a family of jerkers living not far from Greenville, a small hamlet located directly along their route. More news of the “jerkers of Greenville” quickly followed as they traveled up the Great Valley. And so, on January 31, 1805, Bates and Youngs set out for Clover Mount, the imposing stone plantation house of a Revolutionary War veteran, Presbyterian elder, and slaveowner named Robert Tate.<sup>14</sup>

In one of the most extraordinary religious encounters of the early nineteenth century, Tate and his children patiently spent more than two hours responding to the Shakers’ probing questions and describing how they had been “seized with the Jerks” during the previous months. The involuntary bodily fits, they explained, came “Immediately from God”; they struck down pious saints and notorious sinners seemingly without warning.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel M. Wallace to Nancy Fleming, July 20, 1804, box 1a, William Fleming Correspondence, Collection 009, Special Collections, Washington and Lee University; Howard McKnight Wilson, *The Lexington Presbyterian Heritage: The Presbytery of Lexington and Its Churches in the Synod of Virginia, Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Verona, VA., 1971), 80; William Radford to John Preston, May 14, 1805, Preston Family Papers, Mss 1 P9267 f, Virginia Historical Society; James Robinson to Ashbel Green, January 14, 1805, *General Assembly’s Missionary Magazine; Or Evangelical Intelligencer* 1 (July 1805): 358. See, “The Life and Times of Robert B. McAfee and His Family Connections,” *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society* 25 (1927): 232; J. Manning Potts, Elmer T. Clark, and Jacob S. Payton, eds., *The Journals and Letters of Francis Asbury* (Nashville, 1958), 3:327; “A Letter from the Rev. Mc’Leain,” *The Experienced Christian’s Magazine: Consisting Chiefly of Original Narrations, Showing the Increase of Christ’s Kingdom in America* 2 (June 1805): 42-45; “The Jerks,” *Virginia Argus*, October 24, 1804.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin S. Youngs, *Journal*, 1805, 18-19, 21, no. 859, Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, 1747-1982, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Library, Wilmington, DE (JBY Winterthur).



*Clover Mount, the handsome stone plantation house of Presbyterian elder Robert Tate, still stands in a bucolic vale near Greenville, Virginia, looking much the same today as it did when the Shaker missionaries visited in 1805. Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia.*

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Tate's daughter, Ellen, for example, had experienced jerking fits during weekly church services, while she performed her private devotions, as she went about her daily routines, and even in bed. For staunch Calvinist Presbyterians often anxious about their prospects for salvation, the violent convulsions appear to have had a calming effect. According to the Tates, they incited people to a "greater watchfulness" over the subjects' thoughts and actions.<sup>15</sup>

The interview questions that Benjamin Youngs copied into Meacham's letter to the elders in New Lebanon slanted in a decidedly Shaker theological direction. The missionaries wanted to know whether the Tates' experiences of the jerks had led them to reject Calvinist beliefs in original sin and seek after a life of sinless perfection; whether they thought that bodily exercises heralded the beginning of the millennium; and, most important, whether they now questioned the sanctity of marriage. When it became clear that the Tates remained firmly entrenched in their Presbyterian beliefs and traditions, the Shakers politely ended the conversation. But as they were preparing to

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<sup>15</sup> Meacham, Bates, and Youngs to "Beloved Elders & brethren," January 31, 1805. Born around 1753, Robert Tate was the son of a prominent Augusta County, Virginia, farmer, mill owner, and magistrate. He married Margaret McClung in 1775 and served in the Revolutionary War. Tate died in 1832 and was buried at the Bethel Presbyterian Church in Staunton, Virginia, where he had served as an elder for many years. See, Agnes Graham Sanders Riley, "The Pioneer Tate Family of Augusta County, Virginia," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 57 (1969): 179-81, 190; Robert Tate Will, June 19, 1824, Augusta County, Virginia, Will Book No. 18 (1831-1833), microfilm, 313-14, Library of Virginia, Richmond; Herbert S. Turner and James Sprunt, *Bethel and Her Ministers, 1746-1946*, 2d ed. (Verona, VA, 1974), 94-96, 244. On Clover Mount see, Calder Loth, ed., *The Virginia Landmarks Register*, 4th ed. (Charlottesville, 1999), 47; Ann Eckert Brown, *American Wall Stenciling, 1790-1840* (Hanover, NH, 2003), 126-27.

depart, several members of the family were suddenly “taken with the Jerks.” Bates and Youngs watched with fascination as the bodies of sixteen-year-old Phoebe Tate, her older sister, and brother-in-law began careening backwards and forwards in their chairs “all as quick as lightning.” The “Power of God,” Youngs wrote excitedly, was “wonderful beyond our expression.”<sup>16</sup>

Following the interview with Robert Tate and his family, the trio of missionaries resumed their journey. Another week of “severe & rough traveling” brought them to a smoky log tavern in Fincastle, Virginia, where they put the finishing touches on their first letter and placed it in the mail to New Lebanon. After more than a month on the road, struggling through bitter cold, snow, and ice, the Shaker missionaries had covered more than 600 miles. They remained optimistic about their prospects. “It appears to us that all the Religious movements in Virginia, are but as the outermost twigs of a Tree, or as the distant rays of the Sun; in comparison of a Greater & deeper work of God in the States of Kentucky & Tennessee,” Meacham wrote, reflecting on what they had seen at the Tate homestead. Ahead lay Abingdon and the distinctive religious culture of the East Tennessee jerkers.<sup>17</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Greenville (Virginia) January 31st 1805<sup>18</sup>

Beloved Elders & brethren,

Notwithstanding we have not been able to obtain information respecting our business which we would wish; Yet as from our long absence, we have reason to believe that by this time our brethren & Sisters have a desire to hear from us, & to be informed of our situation, we think it best to improve the present opportunity to write. We have kept a strict Journal of our travel, and of all our proceedings Since we left Lebanon, which cannot conveniently have a place in this letter; Yet we think it will not be amiss to Give the following account.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Meacham, Bates, and Youngs to “Beloved Elders & brethren,” January 31, 1805.

<sup>17</sup> JBY Winterthur, 24; Meacham, Bates, and Youngs to “Beloved Elders & brethren,” January 31, 1805.

<sup>18</sup> The transcription of the January 31, 1805 letter draws upon the expanded method outlined in Mary-Jo Kline, *A Guide to Documentary Editing*, 2d ed. (Baltimore, 1998), 157-58, 161-64; Samuel Eliot Morison, “Care and Editing of Manuscripts,” in *The Harvard Guide to American History*, ed. Frank Freidel, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 1:28-31. I have supplied concluding punctuation, capitalized the first words of sentences, and expanded the authors’ abbreviations throughout. Conjectural readings and missing words appear in square brackets. Shaker missionary John Meacham composed the January 1, 1805, letter on a large folded sheet of paper measuring approximately 32.5 cm tall by 19.5 cm wide. Benjamin Youngs wrote the last section describing the Shakers’ interview with the Tate family. All three missionaries signed the letter and appended individual postscripts. Youngs also kept a travel journal (JBY Winterthur) during the Long Walk, and he appears to have copied Meacham’s letter into a small stitched booklet. Both of these texts contain additional details, which are described in the notes that follow.

<sup>19</sup> Meacham was referring to Youngs’s travel journal, JBY Winterthur.





Map of the Shaker Long Walk, 1805. By Mark Cook.

The two days we rode with J.S.<sup>20</sup> He brought us 102 Miles. The next day which is Wednesday the 3d of the Month, is a cold blustering day. Travil 20 Miles and put up in Greens-borough.

Thursday 4. The weather is very cold, and the wind boisterous; the traviling is much obstructed by drifts of Snow & dirt, blown into the road together. Put upon in the Suburbs of the City of New York. 28 Miles

Saturday 5. Pass through the part of the City to the River, at a place where we expected to cross, but the passage is obstructed by reson of Ice. Then down to White-hall Slip at the Southwest corner of the City. Here we wait all day for an oportunity to cross but failed; the cause was, there was no crossing yeasterday by reason of the extream wind that blew, for which cause hundreds of people were waiting & watching for the first chance; besides there has been but little crossing today, on account of the multitude of Ice, floating up & down the River with the Tide. It is the General opinion of People, that they have not experienced So cold a turn for a number of Years. 3 Miles

Sabbath 6. About 11 Oclock in the forenoon, we Get into a boat and Set off, and about 12 reach the Jerisy Shoar at Powlers-hook, from thence come on 3 Miles to Hackinsack-Bridge where we Stay till Monday morning.<sup>21</sup> This tarry in New York was to us, a very disagreeable Scene and very expensive. We meant to have crossed the River at Fish-kill, but there was no crossing between Poughkeepsy & New York. Perhaps we ought to have crossed at Hudson. 6 Miles

Monday 7. Since we have come So far to the South, we cannot learn as there is any way to Abingdon So direct as the Main post-road to the Washington City. The traviling is not very good. Today we are informed that foot passingers have crossed the River this morning on the Ice; the first instance, as we are informed, Since the year 1780 of Peoples crossing from the York to the Jerisy Shoar upon the Ice, oposit the City of New York. 20 Miles

Tuesday 8. The traviling is Good, and the weather pleasant. 34 Miles

Wednesday 9. It has rained a considerable part of the night past, and Still keeps on this morning; after waiting a spell, fering least the ice upon the Delaware River would be so weakened by the rain as to render it impassable, come on. Get very wet. Pass through Trenton & cross the River on the Ice. This is the line between the States of New Jersey & Pensilvania. 20 Miles

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Youngs and Issachar Bates identified this individual as John Shapley (1745-1812). He was an early resident of Hancock, Massachusetts, who converted to Shakerism during the 1780s along with his wife, brother, son, and grandchildren. See, JBY Winterthur, 1; [Moses Eastwood], transcription, "A Concise Sketch of the Life and Experience of Isachar Bates, Written by Himself," ca. 1856, 35, box 4, Shakers Collection, Dayton Public Library, Dayton, Ohio; Brian J.L. Berry, *Westward the American Shapleys: The Family and Descendants of David Shapley, a Seventeenth-Century Marblehead Fisherman* (Baltimore, 1987), 42-50; Wallace H. Cathcart, Shaker Membership Card File, no. 031192, microfilm, Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS.

<sup>21</sup> Paulus Hook, now part of Jersey City, New Jersey, was separated from the town of Newark by the Hackensack River. The Shaker missionaries' route from New Lebanon, New York, through Trenton, New Jersey may be traced in detail in, Simeon DeWitt, *A Map of the State of New York* (Albany, 1802), available at, <https://www.loc.gov/item/73693310>.



Thursday 10. It has rained all the night past without any Sasation, but today it has Snowed the cheaf of the time till Just night and then begins to hail. 15 Miles

Friday 11. The Hail is about 6 about inches deep, corse & dry. It is now a thing next to an imposibility to travil atall; our feet are continually upon the Slide, in one direction or another. Pass through Phillidelphia. 14 Miles

Saturday 12. Extreem bad traveling.<sup>22</sup> Pass the line between Pensilvania and Delaware. 29 Miles

Sabbath 13. Not liking the place where we are, proseed on. 7 Miles

Monday 14. Pass the line between Delaware & Mariland. Proseed on and cross the Susquehannah River at its mouth upon the Ice in open vew of the head of the Chesapeek Bay. 27 Miles

Tuesday 15. It Snows very briskly this morning about 2 hours. Make a Stand at McComas's in Abingdon to Get our cloths washed. 9 Miles

Wednesday 16. Start at about 15 minits past 2 in the afternoon. Come 11 Miles and put up. Here as well as in other plases, there is much Said respecting the Severity of the weather. It is General conclusion that there has not been So cold a winter Since the Year 1780. 11 Miles

Thursday 17. Pass through Baltimore. 29 Miles

Friday 18. A very rainy day.<sup>23</sup> It has rained a great deal the night past; it now Seems, we Stand in need of Ferry boats, to pass, even where there is no other water but what is made by the present rain and melted Snow; but by climbing fences &c. we make a Shift to advance. 10 miles

Saturday 19. The weather has Shifted from warm to very cold. Proseed on. Pass through Washington City, thence 2 Miles to Georgetown, thence 4 miles up the Potomack River where we cross it upon a Toal bridge; in crossing this River we pass the line between Marriland & Virginia.<sup>24</sup> 30 Miles

<sup>22</sup> Youngs's copy of Meacham's original letter reads: "The travling is a little better. The crust bears up but is Slippery & dangerous. In the path where it is trodden by the horses it remains like a bed of coarse dry sand." Youngs copies of letters sent to the elders and deacons at New Lebanon on January 31, April 27, and September 26, 1805, [4], IV:B-66, Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS.

<sup>23</sup> Youngs included the following observation in his copy of Meacham's original letter: "We should not have attempted to travel was it not for the disagreeableness of the place where we have lodged." Youngs copies of letters, [5], Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS.

<sup>24</sup> The first of several nineteenth century precursors to the historic "Chain Bridge" spanning the Potomac River at Georgetown was built in 1797, but it washed away in a flood, as Meacham's letter indicated. Rebuilt in 1804, a second toll bridge was damaged by fire several months after the Shakers passed through the region. Youngs chronicled their harrowing crossing in greater detail: "from Washington we turned North West up the River Potomack through Georgetown & from thence 4 miles up the river to the bridge in a desolate looking road, between 2 hills. We left one hill & passed a quarter of a mile on over a low place of Rocks & water, to the bridge. Here we led up our horse upon stairs 30 feet high to a very dreary looking place. The bridge is 100 yards across from butment to butment, 30 feet above the water, & all the water of the Potowmack 30 feet deep running under it with great fury. A toll house stands on one of the butments a dangerous looking place. One part of the bridge was taken away last June by a flood which rose 30 feet above the common level of the river. From the bridge on the Virginia side we went North West 12 miles to James Wiley in a place called Difficult, where we got about half past 7 in the evening, weary enough, the road having all day been [disagreeable] & also dangerous on account of ice." JBY Winterthur, 15-16.

Sabbath 20. It Snows the cheaf part of the day and the night following.

Monday 21. We think we never experianced much colder weather than the present. The wind is furious, and the Snow flies like a fogg; the new Snow is dry, & the Ice Under it as Smooth as Glass. We do not travil.

Tuesday 22. The roads are very much drifted. Put up in Lees-bourgh, at a Tavern kept by a woman who belongs to the Methodist Society, and who informs us that there has been a Great revival of Religion in this Town; and that in Greenville which is about 140 Miles from here, and on our way to Abingdon there is a people who are excersised with operations which are called the Jerks, that a Great deal of derision is made of this work, that it falls upon many who are opposed to it, and who fight the Power while it is upon them, that a certain man in Allixandria near the Federal Citty, had presumtously defied the Jerks to Seize him, that not long after, they came upon him, that the first Jerk broke his back, & the Second his neck, & So he died immidiately.<sup>25</sup> 22 Miles

Wednesday 23. The roads are a Good deal blocked up Yet. 22 Miles

Thursday 24. Put up in Middletown; here again, we are informed of the Jerkers in Greenville; and further, that in Kentucky there are Great numbers of People, who have revolted from the Methodists and Presbiterians, and refuse to Join themselves to any Denomination of a former Standing; and that they Give themselves no other name or title than that of christians. 22 Miles

Friday 25. It has rained a considerable part of the night past, and is very warm, which has occasioned a Sudden thaw; the road in Some plases is Quite muddy.<sup>26</sup> 25 Miles

Saturday 26. Come on 6 Miles to the Shanondoah River which by reason of the rain and thaw, is high and impassable, So that we are obliged

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<sup>25</sup> Youngs reported the scene at McCabe's tavern in Leesburg, Virginia, in greater detail: "At 8 we eat a very indifferent supper of Broiled meat & pork warm bread cakes & little else. After Supper we received some information respecting the jerkers &c. but it was amazingly misconstrued. Some of it was that they (the Methodists) had had the same operations & that the people in this place had met with a wonderful revival, & that many were very shining lights &c. but it was dead to us. She also said that she was informed of the jerking exercise being among a people 13 miles from Staunton (Virginia), & also that she was credibly informed last sabbath at Alexandria of a bitter opposer against the jerkers, who first went to a tavern & drank largely & then went to meeting, was seized with 2 jerks. The first broke his back the 2d his neck." JBY Winterthur, 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Youngs recorded the following conversation in his journal: "After paying a very reasonable price for our entertainment, At 7 we set out. Isachar tarried a little behind with the horse. The following dialouge between the young man & Isachar took place. Y. 'what are the names of the two men with you?' I. 'so & so.' What denomination are you of? I. 'we are of no denomination.' 'What do you call yourselves?' 'We call ourselves believers. We are not of any denomination or name, but we expect a name better than of sons & of daughters,' 'Well' said the young man 'there are many of such people in Kentuckey who will be called by no name but Christians & many have left the Prisbiterians & Methodists & gone to them.'" JBY Winterthur, 19-20.

to tarry here till Monday.<sup>27</sup> 6 Miles

Sabbath 27. When we Got up this morning the Snow had fell about 12 inches deep and it continues to Snow all day.

Monday 28. The River has fallen considerably, and we cross it without much difficulty. Wade through the Snow about 25 Miles.

Tuesday 29. Put up in Stanton. 24 Miles

Wednesday 30. Come on to Greenville and Send our cloths to be washed.<sup>28</sup> 12 Miles

Thursday 31. While we wait for our cloths, we have a feeling to See Some of these Jerkers; but as we think it not expedient for all to Go, Benjamin & Issachar Go today, to See them about 3 or 4 Miles out from this Village while I Stay in the Village. An account of the conversation they had with them is Given as follows, in Benjamin's own handwriting.

At about 12 Oclock we came near the House of — & were met by a couple of young men who received us with kindness, & took us into a room where five or six young men & a young woman were sitting.<sup>29</sup> In

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<sup>27</sup> Youngs's copy contained the following details not appearing in Meacham's original letter: "Benjamin makes the first attempt to cross, but as the currant is rapid, as soon as he had got to where the horse could not reach the bottum, he was immediately carried downstream about 2 rods, & then with some difficulty came out at the same side he went in. We then return back about a mile to the tavern where we had breakfasted, & then make a stand till Monday morning. Here we get our boots repair'd." Youngs copies of letters, [8], Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS.

<sup>28</sup> Youngs described the events of the day in greater detail in his copy of Meacham's original letter: "Breakfast at one Brown's Inn. Here we light of a company conversing about the religious movements in Tennessee. One of these men lives in that State. He relates the various exercises of which he had been an eye witness, which was jumping, Shouting, laughing, Singing, dancing, Jerking, running, &c." Youngs copies of letters, [9], Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS. His travel journal includes a more detailed account of the rumors the missionaries heard at Brown's tavern: "while here we accidentally heard the Relation of one Hances a Minister from the Tenesee Indians to Congress, respecting the jerkers of Greenville of that state in his neighborhood. He was an opposer to the work, but doubtless gave a very true account of them &c. &c. From Browns we went 4 miles to Greenville a small village of log houses & put up at Samuel Finleys a civill & decent house, & took a room while we put [our] cloths to wash &c. P.M. we again heard of the landlord by inquiring of the jerkers who are about here &c. At 6 we eat supper, & in the evening spend some time in writing, having the room to ourselves & something comfortable." JBY Winterthur, 22. A prosperous merchant, tavern owner, and slaveowner, Samuel Finley (1775-1849) married Robert Tate's niece in 1796 and worshipped alongside his family of jerkers in the Bethel Presbyterian Church. His timber framed house, the first in Greenville, served as a tavern early in the nineteenth century and eventually developed into a prominent hotel following the Civil War. See, Vogt and Kethley, *Augusta County Marriages*, 85; Weaver, "Here Lyeth," 94; Laten Bechtel, ed., *Slaves in Will Books: Augusta County, Virginia, 1745-1866* (Fishersville, VA, 2015), 238, 281; Turner and Sprunt, *Bethel and Her Ministers*, 95; Michael S. Shutty Jr., *An Old House in Greenville, Virginia: A Study of Human Intention in Vernacular Architecture* (Blacksburg, VA, 1997), 53-55.

<sup>29</sup> In 1805, Robert Tate's large family included James (1781-1857), Ellen (1783-1865), John (1785-1854), William (1787-ca. 1850), Phoebe (1789-1846), Rebecca (b. 1792-after 1832), Isabella (1795-1818), Peggy (1797-1814), and Sally (1799-after 1832). Tate's two oldest daughters lived nearby: Elizabeth (1775-1861), who married James Allen in 1793, and Polly (1777-1856), who married Samuel Wallace the following year. Riley, "Pioneer Tate Family," 190; John Vogt and T. William Kethley Jr., *Augusta County Marriages, 1748-1850* (Athens, GA, 1986), 388; Dorothy Lee Weaver, comp., "'Here Lyeth': Tombstone Inscriptions of Most Cemeteries in the Riverheads District of Southern Augusta County, Staunton, Virginia," 1987, typescript, 97, 99-101, 274, Library of Virginia.

there appearance or conversation was nothing extraordinary. We informed them of what we yesterday heard, of a strange work's being in this place, particularly in this family. They were very free to give any information they were able. And after some introduction, & a few words of conversation respecting these things, the following took place.<sup>30</sup>

Question. Where, & in what manner did you first meet with these exercises?

Answer. Before I was exercised I felt an enmity in my mind against these things. But about six months ago I was at a meeting 20 miles from home; & while I was standing up with a number & singing, I suddenly fell down; & though I well remember the words I was singing; yet, I never had the least sence of [any]thing extraordinary's taking place in body or mind, or that one thing was the cause of it more than another. Since then, I have been exercised in laughing; very different from common laughing, because my mind always felt calm & serious; it was involuntarily; & in so powerful a manner that I could not help it. And sometime after the bodily exercise I took the Jerks, & was the first person that had it in these parts. Sometimes I have had it in meditating on serious things when alone, sometimes by seeing the situation of the wicked, sometimes by reading, or hearing some striking expressions, sometimes in going about my common employment, & sometimes while in bed.

Q. In what state is the mind generally left of those who are thus exercised?

A. The mind is always left calm immediately after the Jerks, & even when the mind is going astray, & off her watch; or is in a fretful or discontented condition; these exercises immediately effect a composed mind; & seem as it were to move the person to greater watchfulness.

Q. Do young people who are thus exercised have any fondness for young & vain company, or do they feel an enmity against their proceedings?

A. They are not so fond of these things as formerly; they are more after serious things.

Q. Do these exercises produce an enmity against all sin?

Q. Have any of those in your Society who are thus exercised, received any further light in relation to living free from all sin?

A. They have not, but I can only speak for one. I have not, & the more I have thought of these things, the more I am sensible of the corruptness and depravity of my nature, & my inability to live free from all sin.

Q. But, laying aside your own inabilities, & all self sufficiencies, has

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<sup>30</sup> Cancelled: "kindly received." The remaining paragraphs in the body of the letter were written by Benjamin Youngs. His brief account of these unusual events in his travel journal reads: "At 9 we eat breakfast & about 10 we went 3 Miles to Robert Bates, a family of Jerkers. He is an elder of a Presbyterian Society. 7 of his family have the Jerks with himself. 2 hours had conversation with several & saw what was very wonderful, the power of God in unsanctified vessels &c. &c. We were treated with great kindness &c. At 3 we returned to Finleys & eat Dinner very good & spent the P.M. & evening very comfortably in writing." JBY Winterthur, 22-23.

it not entered into your mind, that through the power of God, & of Jesus Christ, there might be even a probability of a way to live free from all sin?

A. It has not. (We believe in the Calvinistic doctrine.) I do not think it possible while here in this flesh.

Q. Have those exercises ever created a desire to live free from all sin?

A. They have, & I have had such desires before.

Q. Have any of those in your Society so exercised had any particular view of the work of God spoken of by the Prophets which was to take place in the latter days?

A. They have not.

Q. It has been observed in most all reformatations, that young people who were zealous & under the influence of the Spirit, felt averse to marrying; has it been the case here?

A. It has. Their feelings are contrary to it; & many have even declared they would never marry, but meant to devote their time to serious things, & others that if ever they did marry it would be to none but those who were religious.

Q. It has also been frequently observed of young people who were zealous in those reformatations, that whenever they married they lost their zeal & became lifeless. Has this been the case?

A. We cannot tell; the work has not been long enough in this place to determine, though a couple were married who had these exercises before they were married, & continue to have them still, & are very zealous.

Q. Have these exercises produced any alteration in your Ceramones or Principles?

A. No, they have not; we hold our meetings as usual, & those who are exercised do not make so much disturbance as at the first, neither do people take so much notice of it.

Q. What effect have these things on the minds of opposers?

A. It seizes instantly on opposers as well as on others. It reforms those who become Subjects to it, & the Jerks leave those who continue long to fight against it.

Q. Where was the first rise of the work?

A. The first rise of the bodily exercise began at Kentucky about 3 years ago, from thence it went to Tenessee, but after this, the Jerking first took place at Tenessee & spread from thence to Kentucky, & has also made some progress in these parts. The laughing & Dancing exercises have also been prevalent. I have seen some dance a perfect dance after a tune, & when there was no tune sung, they would with their fingers beat the time on their hands & dance after it.

Q. Have ever any been hurt, as to their health or constitution by reason of these exercises?

A. Not any, but the contrary is supposed. If any alteration, the persons health is better, & their Ideas much quicker & brighter than usual.

Q. How are these things looked upon, as coming through the instrumentality of man, or as immediately from God?

A. Immediately from God, for many have been violently taken with these exercises when they were alone & no one near them, some in one place & some in another, & we are informed that of late abundance of people at Greenbrier over the Mountains, took it into their heads to meet together & were mostly or all seized with the Jerks, & had no one to preach or to pray with them. But now they have praying enough, & one or two Preachers have been to see them, but there is none established among them yet.<sup>31</sup>

It is to be observed that the above Answers are not the result of individual situation, or opinions; but general, in this family & Society, as they were candidly given by the head of the family, who is the principal Elder of the Society; by one of his sons, & two of his daughters, & these all call themselves Subjects to this exercise.

The Society consists of about 30 persons, 10 or 12 of whom are called Subjects; & 7 of these belong to this family; the Elder, two of his sons, a son in [law], & three of his daughters. Note: The Society is Presbyterian. The falling down is called bodily exercise; & the fourth question was not promptly answered.

Besides the above we hope it may be proper to add a few observations of our own. A young woman of about 23 who gave the first two answers, and some part of the others, was said to be the greatest Subject to the Jerks, but we saw none of it. The cause to us was plain; but this we leave. During our conversation a young woman of about 16, her married sister, & brother in law; came into the room & sat down. These three were all taken with the Jerks, & to see persons both single, & married; in whom appeared not the least reformation, of Dress or manners, life or conversation; exercised by the Power of God in so extraordinary a manner, is wonderful beyond our expression. While sitting on the chair, their bodies would instantly appear stiff, the hands locked, the eyes closed, & the head jerked backwards over the chair, all as quick as lightning. They would remain thus from perhaps two to five seconds, & then with a simple & composed look, moderately bring their heads forward again. These things we have seen with our eyes.

John Meacham  
Issachar Bates  
Benjamin S. Youngs

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<sup>31</sup> On November 3, 1804, Methodist minister James Ward reported an outbreak of the jerks during a camp meeting at Big Levels in the Greenbrier Valley of what is now West Virginia: "At this meeting some began to jirk, which seemed to stop the progress of the work; but the Lord wrought, and about twenty, we trust, were converted: some of those were from that wild country Strougs, and they took the fire home with them, and a considerable work has taken place among them, without the assistance of a preacher. Thus, glory to god, he works by various means upon the hearts of the people." *Extracts of Letters, Containing Some Account of the Work of God since the Year 1800* (New York, 1805), 101.





Note the foregoing account of our travil is but a Slighty computation for each day as we traviled; which does not agree with printed way-bills, making the distance considerably less than it is in them; and less than what it really is.

It appears to us that all the Religious movements in Virginia, are but as the outermost twigs of a Tree, or as the distant rayes of the Sun; in comparison of a Greater & deeper work of God in the States of Kentucky & Tenesee; though there is a considerable number of the people which are called Jerkers who are Scattered in the different Societies of the Methodists & Presbiterians and but few in a place. We have therefore felt to make no Stay among them.

In vewing the Maps, it appears to be a Great roundabout; to Go by the way of Abingdon in this State, & from thence to Tenesee, and thence back to Lexington in Kentucky; but by all the information that we can Gether, the difference in the Length of way, between this, and the road by the way of Pitts-bourg, as the roads run, is but trifling. All the travillers to Kentucky, from Virginia, Marriland, Delaware; and I believe the Greatest part from Penslvania, & many from New Jersy take this route.

Our journey hitherto has been very Slow and fateuiging; and our expence, as we believe has been nearly double to what it would have been, in the Same distance, and on the Same road in a favorable time. Owing to the Severity of the weather, and the difficulty in Geting about, there has been but very little travilling, but of the Stages; for which reason the roads have not been So much trodden as they would have otherwise have been; though this in Some respects has been rather condusive to our advantage, as we have had the trouble of meeting but few People on the road; & the Public Houses in General have been very emty.

We are now nearly 600 Miles from Lebanon, and about 200 from Abingdon, about the Same distance from the nearist bounds of Tenesee, and about 470 from Lexington in Kentucky.

We are not in any Situation at present to receive any communication from Lebanon; when that Shall be the case we Shall endeavour to write immediately or before if necessary.

We are all in tollerable health, & comfortable.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Youngs added the following in his copy of Meacham's original letter: "The horse we took with us from Lebanon has performed the journey very well & is in good care." Youngs copies of letters, [19], Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS.

My love to all my Elders, Brethren, & Sisters; and in perticular, to Elder Ebenezer S.M., S.W. The Elder Sister, Love & Deborah and all the family.<sup>33</sup> I most Sincerely desire to be remembred by all the faithfull in the Gospel, which I feel to be my only Interest.

J.M.

After my love to my Elders and all the Brethren & sisters I Desire that my family may be informed that I am well and send my love to Levina and the Children Desiring that they wold Be mindfull of what they have bin taught and of what I expect they are taught in my absence from.

I.B.<sup>34</sup>

Though I expect that continual crosses, & abiding trials are in this life allotted me as a peculiar Inheritance; Yet, I sincerely desire that I may have the satisfaction of ever being found, “not doing mine own will, but the will of those who sent me.” To this end I humbly request the prayers of my most beloved Elders; whose many, & very precious councils, feel to me a present treasure in this wilderness.

My kind love to Elder Ebenezer, Elder Sister, & all my brethren & sisters; perticularly of that family; from the greater part of whom I have received many & kind favours.

As to my health, I feel that I have great cause of thankfulness, that my health has been preserved ever since I left Lebanon; & my strength renewed “day by day.”

I most sincerely desire to be remembered by all the faithful in the Gospel, which I feel to be my only Interest.

B.S.Y.

[To Be Continued]

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<sup>33</sup> Meacham's postscript extends greetings to Ebenezer Cooley (1737-1817), the Shaker elder at New Lebanon; his counterpart, "Elder Sister" Lucy Wright (1760-1821), who led the Shakers for nearly a quarter century; and Love Meacham (1769-1852), John's first cousin and eldress of the North Family at New Lebanon. The other figures are more difficult to determine. "S.W." may have been Seth Y. Wells (1767-1847), an important early Shaker convert and educational leader. See, Cathcart, Shaker Membership Card File, no. 003367, Shaker Manuscripts, WRHS; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers*, 234-35, 250-51. On Wright's leadership see, Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 49-57.

<sup>34</sup> Written and initialed in the hand of Issachar Bates, this postscript includes references to the Shaker missionary's wife, Lovina (1760-1828), and his nine children, whom he had left behind at New Lebanon. See, Medlicott, *Issachar Bates*, 37-38, 308-310.